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Born into Slavery: The American Slave Child Experience

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BORN INTO SLAVERY:
THE AMERICAN SLAVE CHILD EXPERIENCE

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For John, Ryan, and Sarah who, in one way or another, made this thesis possible.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the lives of children born as slaves in America from the late eighteenth century to emancipation.

Slave narratives (published both before and after emancipation) were the major source of information. Plantation records, masters' and mistresses' journals, travelers' accounts, and other published works constituted the rest of the resources.

Several topics were explored: legal status, material conditions, care and treatment, family relationships, owner-slave relationships, and labor requirements. The object was to determine the conditions of slave life for these children and the influence these conditions had on them.

The source material suggests that proximity to family and owners influenced how slave children formed value systems and survival techniques. The evidence also suggests that slave children led difficult lives in terms of material conditions and treatment. This was especially true for slave children who lived on smaller plantation holdings or were hired out to factories--having to work from ages as young as four. Slave children who lived on larger holdings of fifty slaves or more, however, did not experience these harsh work conditions until they reached the age of ten or twelve. Although free white children of nonslaveholding families worked from young ages, their material conditions typically were better than those of slave children.

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INTRODUCTION

History is an interpretation of events as they occur over time. Westerners perceive time as linear, with events moving forward. The perception of movement over time creates a past/present/future frame of reference. In many ways, these parameters can cause a problem for historians. It is easy to forget that the origins of any culture are firmly rooted in its past and can best be understood only in that context. Each person born into a specific cultural group must learn and grow by assimilating and adapting the manners and mores of his or her group. This thesis focuses on a specific historical group as they acquired their culture: children born as slaves in America.

American slavery--with its dehumanizing value system--was not far removed in time from serfdom, medieval ordeals, and public methods of criminal punishment such as flogging, burning at the stake, drawing and quartering, and beheading. Thomas Jefferson was only five years old when a slave woman was convicted and burned at the stake for poisoning her master.[1] History is full of what most late-twentieth-century Americans would call cruelty, injustice, and greed.

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[1]Fawn M. Brodie, Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 49.

The irony of slavery in its Americanized form is its existence alongside a belief in the American Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, which boldly stated that all men are created equal and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. By definition, slaves had no liberty. As chattel, they had no right to the pursuit of happiness. The only right they had by law was the right to life, and this right was sometimes ignored by those who ruled over them. Still, slaves were not merely passive players. They developed a rich and unique culture that helped them to survive their predicament. But the hazards of the slave system were never far from view.

Much has been written about the transition of native Africans to slavery in the Western Hemisphere.[2] Although most native Africans adapted to their new lives in America, they remained essentially Africans. It was their descendants who forged a new cultural identity that included their African heritage and their identities as slaves in the New World. Peter Kolchin has discussed this new distinctive African-American culture in American Slavery: 1619-1877: "The process of creating this culture was by no means

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[2]Peter Kolchin, American Slavery: 1619-1877 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 40-62. Herbert G. Gutman in The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925, Eugene D. Genovese in Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made, and Allan Kulikoff in Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 also explore the transition of slave culture from African to African-American.

linear; the pace varied over both time and space in conformity with diverse conditions. . . . Nor did the process occur in isolation from whites. . . . If in some respects blacks and whites inhabited very different worlds in colonial America, those worlds were closely intertwined and bore more in common than was readily apparent to the inhabitants of either."[3] By the American Revolution, the clear majority of slaves were not native Africans but American-born slaves.[4]

The first federal census in 1790 counted 697,897 slaves, approximately one-third of the southern population. By 1810, two years after the end of legal importation of slaves, the number had increased to 1,191,354.[5] The federal census of 1820 was the first to record the nation's black population by age. It listed 761,753 blacks under the age of fourteen. Only 93,557 of this number were free; the rest, 668,196, were slaves.[6] Thus, within a thirty-year

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[3]Kolchin, American Slavery, 45. Although the transition from an African to an African-American culture is important to an understanding of slave culture, it is not within the parameters of this study. This study concentrates more on the personal level: the formation of individual African-Americans born into slavery from just before the American Revolution to the end of the Civil War.

[4]Peter J. Parish, Slavery: The Many Faces of a Southern Institution ([Durham, England]: British Association for American Studies, 1979), 9.

[5]Kolchin, American Slavery, 93, 94.

[6]Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 1, (Washington, DC:

period, the number of slaves had increased so dramatically that the number of slave children in 1820 nearly equaled the total number of slaves in 1790. By 1860 approximately forty-five percent--1,770,363 children--of the slave population was fourteen years old or younger (see Table in Appendix).[7]

The expansion of the slave population continued throughout the antebellum period. The slave population more than tripled between 1810 and 1860, reaching 3,953,760, again approximately one-third of the southern population. The proportion of slaves varied from state to state and from area to area within each state. In 1860, slaves made up about half the population in states of the deep South and from one-fifth to one-third in states of the upper South, with the notable exceptions of Delaware, Maryland, and Missouri where slavery was declining.[8]

Of particular relevance is the distribution of slaves by size of holding. Kolchin included several tables in American Slavery which give the percentages of slave population by state and size of agricultural holding. In

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U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 4, 18, 19. Robert H. Bremner, ed., Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History, Volume I: 1600-1865 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 317. Bremner lists the 1820 under-fourteen population numbers as 763,747 total blacks with 93,551 free and 670,196 slave.

[7]Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, 4, 18, 19.

[8]Kolchin, American Slavery, 93, 94,100-101.

1860, 25.6 percent of all slaves in the South lived on holdings of fewer than ten slaves, while 24.9 percent lived on holdings of fifty or more. Only 2.4 percent of all slaves lived on holdings of 200 or more. Thus, half of all slaves lived on holdings of ten to forty-nine slaves, and three-fourths of all slaves on holdings of ten or more. In the South as a whole, the median figure was twenty-three slaves per holding in 1860.[9]

Kenneth M. Stampp defined the "planter class" as those southerners owning at least twenty slaves. Therefore, more than half of all slaves were owned by the planter class. Conversely, during the antebellum period, the percentage of southern households owning slaves decreased from approximately one-third to approximately one quarter of the white population by 1860. The majority of them were small slaveholders: 88 percent owned fewer than twenty slaves, 72 percent owned fewer than ten, and almost 50 percent fewer than five slaves. Thus, the "typical" slave (i.e., a member of the three-fourths majority who lived on holdings of ten or more) was not owned by the "typical" slaveowner (i.e., one of the 72 percent who owned fewer than ten slaves).[10]

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[9]Kolchin, American Slavery, 100-101, 242-44. Kolchin points out that only 2.7 percent of southern slaveholders owned fifty or more slaves, with only 0.1 percent owning 200 or more.

[10]Frank Lawrence Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South (1949; rpt. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 8; Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Vintage Books,

These statistics are important for the study of the treatment and use of slaves, especially children. Treatment and care of slave children varied, depending on the size of holding and proximity of the children to their parents and owners. The majority of slaves lived on holdings that were large enough to classify their owners as members of the planter class. On these larger holdings, children came into less contact with their owners and, in many cases, less contact with their parents than children on smaller holdings. The children were more likely to be left in the care of a plantation "nurse" who would see to their needs while their parent, or parents, labored for the owner. While the children on larger holdings might suffer from neglect, quite often less work was required of them until they reached the ages of six to ten than was required on smaller plantations. Conversely, on smaller holdings, the children might be able to spend more time with their parents, but they could also be required to perform various tasks at a much younger age.

The size of the holding could also influence the effect that other slaves had on the developing value system of young slave children. Close interaction with adult slaves, especially family members, as well as contact with the owners and overseers who exercised control over their lives, profoundly affected these young slaves. All children are

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1956), 29-31.

impressionable. Childhood is referred to as the "formative years" for good reason. Human beings' most profound memories usually come from their childhood and often involve their families and those closest to them. They assimilate, to various degrees, the ideas and attitudes of those around them. What they do with these ideas and attitudes in large part makes them who they are and become. Slavery was the framework for the lives of slave children. The powerful effects of this peculiar institution should not be underestimated: from a very early age, slaves were forced to act and react to the dynamics of the slave system.

The sources used for this study cover a large area in respect to both time and place. This approach was dictated in large part by the source material. Slave narratives, although numerous, typically do not dwell extensively on the childhood years. Masters' and mistresses' accounts often mention slave children only in reference to the children's health (i.e., serious illness or death). Travelers' accounts, with the exception of Frederick Law Olmsted's, are equally lacking in information on slave children, more difficult to find, and more disparate in respect to time and place. Given the scattered nature of the sources, it would be impractical to canvass childhood slavery comprehensively by concentrating on a narrow band of time or a particular section of the country.

Furthermore, although the slave narratives focus on

different states and regions in the South, the regional variation did not have as much impact on the slave children's day-to-day experiences as did the size of the holdings on which they lived. Even though many slaves believed that slavery was harshest in their particular state, treatment often turned on a slave's individual circumstances and relationship with the master rather than being tied to a particular region. Essentially, kindness and cruelty existed throughout the South and influenced the various perceptions contained in the sources.

Despite the extended time frame of this study, certain facets of childhood slavery remain constant: slave children were cheaply fed and clothed; they died in much higher percentages than white children of the same age; roughly half of all slave children grew up in two-parent families; and most slave children were expected to begin their enforced labor sometime between their sixth and tenth birthdays.

The following chapters discuss some of the factors that influenced the development of slave children: legal status, care, treatment, relations with family and whites, and work. The last chapter includes a brief comparison with white children of nonslaveholding families.

CHAPTER I

GROWING UP A SLAVE: LEGAL STATUS AND MATERIAL CONDITIONS

The helplessness of a child born into slavery in the Old South cannot be overstated. By law, the owner of the child's mother also owned the child. Although laws pertaining to the status of the children of slave mothers had existed long before 1809, a South Carolina court ruling of that year reiterated their condition as chattel. The court ruled that the children of slaves were legally equated with the offspring of animals: "by our law, the brood, or offspring, of tame and domestic animals, is similar to the civil law, which declares that the issue shall follow the condition of the mother, or dam. . . . This law applies to the young of slaves, because as objects of property, they stand on the same footing as other animals, which are assets to be administered. . . . "[11] Such a condition must have led to confusion in children's minds early in life as to whom they were to obey--parents or owners. Slave children had to learn such details as they were growing up and somehow learn what it meant to be someone else's property

[11]Bremner, Children and Youth, 330-31.

and to respond to a variety of authority figures: their parents, the owners, and the overseers. Lessons of this kind could be hard for a child to comprehend. Harriet Jacobs's brother William went to his mistress when called by both her and his father at the same time. His father was angry and told William to come to him when he called and no one else because William was his son.[12] Although deciding which "master" to serve must have been confusing, the raw power of the owner and overseer typically served as a vivid reminder to whom ultimate authority was owed.

While evidence suggests that slave mothers had strong feelings of attachment to their children, their owners often did not share that attachment. Masters and mistresses sometimes developed feelings of tenderness for the slave children under their control, but not always. Owners often viewed their slaves, young and old, primarily as property to be used and disposed of at will. A child at almost any age could be hired out, sold, or willed to someone else at the owner's discretion and without regard to the desires of the parent or the child. Sometimes financial or legal concerns beyond an owner's control dictated the condition of slaves. Bankruptcy, foreclosure, or death of the owner could require the hiring out or selling of slaves. Slave families could also be split up in an owner's will or if the owner died

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[12]Harriet A. Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written By Herself, Jean Fagan Yellin, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 9.

intestate. Some efforts were made by private citizens and states to prevent the separation of slave infants from their mothers. In 1801, the Court of Appeals of Virginia ruled that "separating infant children from their mothers, which humanity forbids, . . . will not be countenanced in a Court of Equity."[13] In 1829, Louisiana forbade the sale of children under the age of eleven apart from their mothers. Before the passage of this law, slave traders shipped a large number of young children to the area for sale. The slave trade of the Virginia-based firm of Franklin and Armfield consisted of 13.3 percent children, which the ban halted. Furthermore, the Alabama slave code of 1852 prohibited the sale of children under five away from their mothers.[14]

Many owners attempted to sell slaves as families rather than split them up. When Ann M. Smyth of Wythe Court House, Virginia, and her family prepared to move to the Northwest Territory in the late 1830s, she wrote to her cousin Sarah B. Preston of Abingdon, Virginia, begging her to buy her pregnant slave Sally and Sally's six children.[15]

But not all attempts to keep young slave children with their mothers were successful. While public opinion across

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[13]Bremner, Children and Youth, 331.

[14]Kolchin, American Slavery, 129-30.

[15]Ann M. Smyth to Sarah B. Preston, 16 February, [1837?], Smyth Slave Sale, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

the South generally disapproved of these separations, many states did not prohibit the sale of any slave of any age. Jim Gillard was sold for $350 around 1850 when he was three months old. Delia Garlic, an adult when the Civil War began, remembered seeing babies taken from their mothers and sold to speculators and children separated from siblings and never seen again.[16]

Children were valuable assets to a slaveholder. Even though slave children cost planters little for care, their owners usually required them to start work at approximately six years of age. The labor slaves provided throughout their lives usually canceled out the cost of rearing them. Slave women were highly valued for their ability to reproduce, and in this respect (although forced breeding was the exception and not the rule), slaves were often viewed by their owners in much the same way as livestock. In 1819, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Joel Yancey: "I consider the

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[16]George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972), ser. 1, vol. 6, Delia Garlic, 129; Jim Gillard, 154. The following examples from Texas mirror events over much of the South. Josie Brown saw "children too little to walk split from their mammys and sold right on the block in Woodville." In May 1859, James Strawther sold a six-week-old female to his sister. Perhaps his sister did not separate the baby from her mother, but the record is silent. Six-year-old Minerva Bratcher was part of the dowry of one of her owner's daughters in the mid-1850s. On the death of his owner, a six-year-old boy in 1859 was hired out and subsequently served four different masters before he turned ten. Randolph B. Campbell, An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 163-64.

labor of a breeding woman as no object, and that a child raised every 2. years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man. . . with respect therefore to our women & their children I must pray you to inculcate upon the overseers that it is not their labor, but their increase which is the first consideration with us." A year later he again wrote to John W. Eppes: "I consider a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man of the farm. what she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labors disappear in mere consumption. ."[17]

In Negro Slavery in Arkansas, Orville W. Taylor wrote that a "major reason for the common practice of giving a slave girl to each member of the owner's family at marriage or some other time was to furnish the nucleus of a new slave working force."[18] It was common for planters wishing to increase the size of their holdings deliberately to purchase young female slaves in the hope that they would prove fertile.[19] Although, unlike animals, slaves were not usually force-bred, this expectation of fecundity was not lost on the slaves. Jane Cotten told her interviewer in the

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[17]Edwin Morris Betts, ed., Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book (rpt. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987), TJ to Joel Yancey, 17 January 1819, 43; TJ to John W. Eppes, 30 June 1820, 46.

[18]Orville W. Taylor, Negro Slavery in Arkansas (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), 194.

[19]Taylor, Negro Slavery in Arkansas, 71.

1930s that "we mostly were like cattle and hogs are today."[20] British actress Fanny Kemble, wife of Pierce Butler, believed that slave women used their ability to produce children to gain the good will of their masters: "This was perfectly evident to me from the meritorious air with which the women always made haste to inform me of the number of children they had borne, and the frequent occasions on which the older slaves would direct my attention to their children, exclaiming: 'Look, missis! little niggers for you and massa; plenty little niggers for you and little missis!'"[21]

Although forced breeding of slaves was not the standard practice, it did occur. Several former slaves from Texas interviewed in the 1930s recalled such episodes. Rose Williams was forced to mate with a young male slave and had two children by him. Jeptha Choice claimed that he was much in demand for breeding purposes. Lewis Jones said that his father had been a "breedin' nigger" for his owner. Mollie Dawson said, "Dey would let you pick out a man or a man pick him out a woman and you was married and if de woman wouldn't has de man dat picks you, dey would takes you ter a big stout high husky nigger somewhere and leaves you a few days jest lak dey do stock now'days and you bettah begins raisin'

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[20]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 155.

[21]Frances Anne Kemble, Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839, ed. John A Scott (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1970), 95-96.

chilluns too. If you didn' dey would works you ter death, dey say dat you no count and dey soon sells you."[22]

Women who could not have children were given harder work to do and were at risk of being sold. Legally, any buyer who could demonstrate that he had been deceived by a seller into buying a slave woman who could not bear children as promised could get his money back.[23] A slaveholder confessed to Frederick Law Olmsted that a great many slave women were sold because they could not have children.[24] Henry Green, a slave in Alabama, remembered that in antebellum days a woman had to "multiply" well or she would be sold.[25]

With an eye to the future, owners allowed mothers time to care for their children after birth to promote the health of the child. Some owners even rewarded their female slaves for each baby they had.[26] Fanny Kemble kept a journal of her visit in 1838-39 to her husband's plantations in Georgia. She noted that the prolific childbearing of the

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[22]Elizabeth Silverthorne, Plantation Life in Texas (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1986), 47.

[23]Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I A Woman? (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 101.

[24]Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States In the Years 1853-1854, With Remarks on Their Economy, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 60-61n.

[25]Rawick, American Slave, ser. 2, vol. 9, Henry Green, 96.

[26]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 247-50.

plantation slave women was the result not of good treatment, but recklessness and owner incentives. "Every woman who is pregnant, as soon as she chooses to make the fact known to the overseer, is relieved of a certain portion of her work in the field, which lightening of labor continues, of course, as long as she is so burdened. On the birth of a child certain additions of clothing and an additional weekly ration are bestowed on the family; and these matters, small as they may seem, act as powerful inducements. . . ."[27]

The Butlers were not the only ones to reward their slave women for childbearing. Major Wallon of Georgia gave each new mother a calico dress and a silver dollar on the birth of her baby. B. Talbert of Virginia freed his slave Jenny after she had had a child for each of his five children. The irony here is clear; manumission for producing more people held in bondage. Like livestock, Jenny was required to increase the herd, but unlike livestock, she was given her personal freedom, a great reward, for doing so. As Jenny demonstrates, women were also rewarded for having many children. In his Plantation Manual, Plowden C. J. Weston advised that all women with six children be given Saturdays off.[28]

The care and treatment of slave children were subject to their owners' evaluation of the children's and their

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[27]Kemble, Journal, 95.

[28]White, Ar'n't I A Woman?, 100.

mothers' worth. Owners put great value on their "breeding women" and often showed special attention to the needs of pregnant slaves and "sucklers" (lactating women) and to their infants. Doctors or midwives usually attended the births of slave babies. With a financial stake in the health of the unborn baby, owners often allowed a pregnant slave to cease hard work a few weeks before her child was to be born. According to Adeline Jackson, women who were pregnant worked until close to their delivery time and were then put in the "cardin' and spinning rooms." After giving birth, the mother was given a few days, sometimes a few weeks, away from her normal occupation to recuperate and to care for and nurse her baby. The length of time allowed varied from place to place. A South Carolinian slaveowner required his slave women to remain at the slave quarters for four weeks after the birth of a child to ensure that their health would not be impaired. In Arkansas, the custom was "two weeks before--two weeks after" the birth of a child. Three weeks were allowed on the Butler plantation in Georgia. Another owner kept his "sucklers" near the quarters, gave them light tasks, and required that they be rested and cool before nursing their babies. Such concern for the health of the mother and child enhanced the prospects of the mother having other children for the owner and the child growing up to labor in the fields.[29]

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[29]Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 3, Adeline Jackson, 3; Taylor, Negro Slavery in Arkansas, 194; Kemble,

Despite the efforts owners took to ensure live, healthy births, the mother's labor was still an important part of her value. When a slave mother returned to her labor for the master, arrangements were made for the care of her baby. Sometimes mothers who worked in the fields were required to take their babies to work with them when the weather permitted. When children were taken to the fields, the plantation nurse (usually an elderly slave woman) cared for them, and the mothers took breaks periodically to nurse them.

Usually the infants were left in the care of an old woman or older children in the slave quarters. Despite owners' wishes for healthy slave children, usually only the elderly or young were assigned for infant and child care; every other able-bodied slave was put to work for the master. On large plantations, nurseries were built and staffed by older children or women who were too old for hard work. At sunrise, mothers left their children in the nurseries on their way to the fields. The nurse was responsible for feeding, washing, looking after the children, and mending their clothes until their mothers retrieved them at the end of the day. Older girls--

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Journal, 214; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 248, 250, 313; John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 179; Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 141-42; Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. King, Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: Diet, Disease, and Racism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 168.

typically around eight or ten years old--were often assigned to the care of infants.[30]

Frederick Law Olmsted noted this practice in his travels through the Rice District of South Carolina and Georgia in the 1850s. On one plantation, the nursery was located in the cabin closest to the overseer's house. Most of the children were infants being tended by eight-to-ten-year-old girls, who in turn, were supervised by an older woman. The "crawlers" were in a pen, and the toddlers were playing on the steps and in front of the house. Olmsted thought the babies were content since none of them ever cried while he was there.[31]

In her travels in Alabama in April 1835, Harriet Martineau visited a plantation slave quarter and made a similar observation: "The children are left, during working hours, in the charge of a woman; and they are bright, and brisk, and merry enough, for the season, however slow and stupid they may be destined to become." Thomas Jefferson also made use of children of both sexes under the age of ten

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[30]Charles Sackett Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933), 64-65; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 313; Blassingame, Slave Community, 170; Julia Floyd Smith, Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 117.

[31]Olmsted, Seaboard, vol. 2, 50-53; Frederick Law Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger (New York: Modern Library, 1984) 185-86.

as infant caretakers.[32]

Fanny Kemble disapproved of "stout, hale, hearty girls and boys" eight and older being allowed to "lounge about, filthy and idle, with no pretense of an occupation but what they call 'tend baby,'" while the babies' mothers were sent to the field. The nurses carried the babies to their mothers when they needed to be breastfed, but left the infants to "crawl and kick in the filthy cabins or on the broiling sand" the rest of the time.[33]

Babies received special attention from their mothers two to four times a day when it was time for breastfeeding. In the nurseries, it was common for babies to have a piece of fat bacon tied on a string around their wrists for use as a pacifier between feedings. Breastfeeding allowed mothers time off from their work, but the owner's demands for their labor restricted the amount of time they could spend with their children. Once a baby was weaned, even the brief periods of nursing were taken away. So mothers had to make use of what little time they had in the mornings and in the evenings for their children.[34]

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[32]Walter Brownlow Posey, ed., Alabama in the 1830s as Recorded by British Travellers, vol. 31, no. 4 (Birmingham: Birmingham-Southern College, 1938), 34; Betts, facsimile, Farm Book, 77.

[33]Kemble, Journal, 156-57, 359-60.

[34]V. Alton Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations (New Orleans: The Louisiana Historical Quarterly, 1924), 85-86; Silverthorne, Plantation Life in Texas, 55; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 185-86; Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi, 64; Blassingame, Slave Community, 179;

After a baby was a few weeks old, an owner focused again on the mother's labor as his primary concern. Because of the separation of mother and child and the number of children of all ages to be cared for by an elderly woman or other children, the quality of personal care was low and children suffered from neglect. Often their caretakers were ignorant of proper child care or, in the case of young nurses, resentful of the work involved. Mattie Fannen of Arkansas started nursing when she was five years old. She did not like children very much because "I got so many whoopings on their blame. I'd drop 'em, leave 'em, pinch 'em, quit walking 'em and rocking 'em. I got tired of 'em all the time."[35] An Alabama planter complained that "small nurses have been the cause of death and many cripples among infants."[36] Good food was not always provided, and medical care was inadequate. Often the masters or mistresses treated the slaves themselves. Mortality rates for slave children (0-4 years old) were more than double those for

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Kenneth F. Kiple, ed., The African Exchange: Toward a Biological History of Black People (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 217. Richard H. Steckel argued that infant mortality was high for slave children in part because slave mothers may have weaned their babies before they were a year old. Evidence of early supplementation supports this theory. Breast milk imparts some immunity to babies, so weaning would have put them at risk, especially if the supplemental food contained contaminants.

[35]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 147.

[36]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 508-09.

white children. These rates remained high throughout the period under study. Allan Kulikoff found that in the Chesapeake in the late eighteenth century one quarter of slave children died before their first birthday and another quarter died before the age of fifteen. The child mortality rate was also fifty percent or more on the Butler plantations in Georgia in the late 1830s. In 1850, slave infants and children accounted for fifty-one percent of all Negro deaths, whereas child mortality accounted for only thirty-eight percent of the total of white deaths.[37]

Poor prenatal and postnatal care and nutritional deficiencies were primary causes of slave mortality.[38]

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[37]Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 73; Kemble, Journal, 223; Parish, Slavery, 26; Blassingame, Slave Community, 181; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 307, 320; J. F. Smith, Slavery and Rice Culture, 137-39; Kiple and King, Black Diaspora, 99-100; Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. Kiple, "Slave Child Mortality: Some Nutritional Answers to a Perennial Puzzle," Journal of Social History, vol. 10, no. 3 (1977), 290-91. Data for the percentages were contained in the two Kiple sources and were compiled from the Census of 1850 for the states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, and Alabama where seventy-five percent of slaves resided. In 1850, 2,539,617 slaves lived in these seven states; about thirty-one percent of them were aged nine and under. The whites in these states numbered 3,221,686 and about thirty-four percent of them were nine and under. When the six most common causes of death among slave children ("convulsions," "teething," "tetanus," "lockjaw," "suffocation," and "worms") are examined, Kiple and King found that the mortality rates among slave infants and children (0-9 years old) were four times greater than rates for whites of the same age.

[38]Four main resources were used for the medical evidence supporting a nutritional basis for morbidity and mortality among slaves. Kiple and Kiple, "Slave Child Mortality," Kiple, African Exchange, Kiple and King, Black Diaspora and Michael P. Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants:

Slave owners were largely ignorant of the importance of nutrition and hygiene in regard to their slaves' health. This ignorance, coupled with their desire to make a profit, promoted conditions in which owners neglected the care of their slaves' children.

The most prevalent causes of death were "convulsions," "lock jaw," "suffocation," "teething," "Tetanus," and "worms."[39] Almost one quarter of the deaths for black children under ten listed in the census of 1850 were the result of these disorders. By comparison, less than twelve percent of white deaths were attributed to those causes.[40]

Teething and convulsions were symptoms of a children's disease called tetany, which was caused by mineral deficiencies. Tetanus and hookworm were also related to poor care and nutrition. Many slave children contracted tetanus through the nonsterile medical procedures used in handling the umbilical cord. Pica, called "dirt-eating" because of its unusual symptom, was a puzzling ailment for slaveholders. It was most common among slave children and pregnant and lactating women, which supports current theory

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Were Slave Mothers at Fault?" The Journal of Southern History, vol. 47, no. 4 (1981). In Black Diaspora, Kenneth F. Kiple argues that "the black genetic heritage coupled with the kinds of foods available to slaves meant a diet that for whites may have been nutritionally adequate, but that for blacks failed to deliver sufficient usable quantities of a number of important nutrients." (72).

[39]Kiple and Kiple, "Slave Child Mortality," 290.

[40]See note 37 for source of data.

that mineral deficiencies (iron, calcium, and magnesium) cause the condition. Some contemporary physicians also believed that it might have been caused by a lack of proper nutrients. Poor nutrition and care of slave children also made them more susceptible to diseases such as smallpox and cholera.[41]

Suffocation deaths were much more common among slaves than whites. Some scholars now believe that the high incidence of suffocation deaths were caused mostly by Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS, which may have a link to poor prenatal care and poor infant diet.[42] Although accidental smothering probably did occur, specific mineral deficiencies are now believed to be the major cause of those deaths attributed to smothering. These deficiencies could have occurred early in pregnancy and resulted in babies being born at much higher risk for SIDS death.[43]

Young slave children suffered from a variety of illnesses and injuries throughout the antebellum period. Chills and fevers were common. Pneumonia, intestinal disorders, cholera, and yellow fever took the lives of many slave children. The usual childhood diseases also took

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[41]J. F. Smith, Slavery and Rice Culture, 137-39; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 304; Kiple and King, Black Diaspora, 75, 113.

[42]Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants," 494. In 1850 the death rate for smothered slaves was twenty-eight times larger than that for whites.

[43]Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants," 508-11, 514-16.

their toll: whooping cough, measles, diphtheria, tetanus, croup, scarlet fever, and rubella. In 1774, Philip Vickers Fithian, tutor for the Carter family in Virginia, attended the funeral of a six-year-old slave child who had rapidly sickened and died with "the Ague & Fever." Elizabeth Edmonia Cooke of Hanover County, Virginia, noted in her journal from the 1850s that "we have had whooping cough amongst the negro children since the last of Dec. There have been 19 cases beside Arthur's children Jenny's infant is the only one which has died, the rest are getting better."[44]

Personal cleanliness does not appear to have been a high priority in many plantation nurseries. Fanny Kemble detested the "filthy" conditions of many of the children she found on her husband's Georgia plantations. Her journal contains several references to her efforts to teach them to be cleaner: "the incrustations of dirt on their hands, feet, and faces were my next object of attack, and the stupid Negro practice (by-the-by, but a short time since nearly universal in enlightened Europe) of keeping the babies with their feet bare, and their heads, already well capped by nature with their woolly hair, wrapped in half a

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[44]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 141; Taylor, Negro Slavery in Arkansas, 155; Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed., Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1957), 182, 184; Elizabeth Edmonia Cooke Journal of 1855-1858 at Dewberry, Hanover County, Virginia, Linwood Warwick Papers, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, 94.

dozen hot, filthy coverings." Kemble found in the infirmaries "filthy, wretched, almost naked, always barelegged and barefooted children." She protested the dirty condition of one sick baby and was told by the child's mother that the slaves did not have time to keep their children clean because of the long hours spent working.[45]

Realizing the difficulty of her task, Kemble resorted to bribery: "I have proclaimed to all the little baby nurses that I will give a cent to every little boy or girl whose baby's face shall be clean, and one to every individual with clean face and hands of their own." Her methods seemed to have an immediate effect. She noted in her journal that "this morning I was surrounded, as soon as I came out, by a swarm of children carrying their little charges on their backs and in their arms, the shining, and in many instances, wet faces and hands of the latter bearing ample testimony to the ablutions which had been inflicted upon them. How they will curse me and the copper cause of all their woes in their baby bosoms!"[46]

Lack of personal hygiene carried over into adolescence and young adulthood as well. Kemble found the two footmen, both between the ages of fifteen and twenty, who waited on her family "perfectly filthy in their persons and clothes--

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[45]Kemble, Journal, 68-69, 72-73, 156; Harriet, the mother of the dirty baby, was flogged by the overseer for telling Kemble she did not have time to tend to her child. (74).

[46]Kemble, Journal, 77.

their faces, hands, and naked feet being literally incrusted with dirt."[47] Like Kemble, Elizabeth Edmonia Cooke tried to teach her slaves the importance of cleanliness. She sent a boy named Nelson home from her Sunday school because he came in very dirty and served only as a laughing stock to the other children.[48]

While slaveowners valued their slave children, the lack of sufficient care provided for them may suggest otherwise; it reflected ignorance on the part of slaveowners as well as a desire to spend as little on care and sustenance of slaves as practicable. Medical care in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was poor for everyone by twentieth-century standards. Slaves were treated by their owners or other slaves who had knowledge of herbs and medicines. Watermelon tea and catnip tea were used to quiet babies, and spring tonics were often given to children to "purify the blood." The seeds of the Jerusalem oak were cooked with molasses and used as worm medicine. Horse Mint tea was used for fever; Horehound tea and Mullen tea were given for colds. Many slave children wore asafetida bags around their necks to ward off a variety of illnesses: smallpox, croup, measles, diphtheria, and whooping cough. It was only when slaves became seriously ill that they received medical care from local physicians, and this care was as good--or bad--as

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[47]Kemble, Journal, 60-61.

[48]Cooke, "Journal," 110.

that provided for whites. Slaveowners also usually had doctors or midwives attend the births of slave babies.[49]

The desire to spare expense was more accurately reflected in the material provisions the slaveowner provided for his slaves and their children. In his travel account of 1846-47, Alexander MacKay wrote: "They are cheaply fed and cheaply clothed."[50] Slave children were given a limited variety of food which came from the produce of the plantation; corn and bacon remained the staples of slave diets throughout the period. If they received anything in addition to what the owner provided, it came from their parents' small garden or from hunting, fishing, and raising their own animals--such as chickens or pigs. Arkansas slave Scott Bond thought it was a great deal of fun to go "possum or coon hunting," and he recalled that the hunt would go on

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[49]Silverthorne, Plantation Life in Texas, 150-51; Kiple and King, Black Diaspora, p. 164, 168; George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Charles Hayes, 3-4; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 3, Agnes James, 9; Ben Leitner, 101; ser. 1, vol. 6, Angie Garrett, 134; George Strickland, 361; Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 141-42; Taylor, Negro Slavery in Arkansas, 161. Slaveowners often referred to their slaves as members of the family and sometimes expressed feelings of concern for those who were ill. When members of the owners family wrote to each other, they included information on the illnesses of the slaves. Overseers and owners also informed each other of the well-being of the slaves. Alexander MacKay noticed during his travels in 1846-47 that close attachments often developed between a master and slave; Taylor, Negro Slavery in Arkansas, 151-152; Alexander MacKay, The Western World: Or, Travels in the United States in 1846-1847 2nd ed. (1849; rpt. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), II, 81.

[50]MacKay, Western World, 148.

until all of the men and boys were loaded up with game.[51]

In Randolph B. Campbell's study of slavery in Texas, based on a sample of 181 former slave interviews conducted during the 1930s, he found that fifty-eight percent remembered having good or adequate food, while fewer than five percent said that they had not had enough to eat. The other thirty-seven percent of the narratives either did not mention or gave no opinion of the food.[52]

While the slaves could supplement their diets themselves, many owners tried to provide seasonal variety in their slaves' food. Sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas (cowpeas), watermelons, turnips, molasses, milk, cabbage, and on occasion even coffee made up part of their rations. Wheat flour was rare. Chicken, fish, sometimes beef or goat, and a variety of game--turkey, squirrel, deer, rabbit, and opossum--could provide supplementary protein to slave diets.[53]

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[51]Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Scott Bond, 28.

[52]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 135-36. Campbell's sources for this survey were the Rawick volumes, and they need to be used with care. Many of the interviewees were very old and living under extremely poor conditions. Their memories could be faulty due to the passage of time. It is not hard to understand that many of these former slaves could look back fondly on slavery as a time when they had no worries about food, considering that they were struggling to survive in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

[53]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 135-36; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 2, Amelia Barnett, 182-83; John Bates, 212.

Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Taylor in December 1794: "I count on potatoes, clover, & sheep. The two former to feed every animal on the farm except my negroes, & the latter to feed them, diversified with rations of salted fish & molasses, both of them wholesome, agreeable, & cheap articles of food."[54] Fanny Kemble wrote in her journal that meat was only occasionally allotted to the harder-working men, and thus she was besieged by a small gang of children begging her for some meat. The ration for children was small--only three quarts of grits a week for a ten-year-old.[55]

On many plantations the slaves ate their meals communally. Owners designated the times as well as the content of the meals. The plantation cook prepared all of the food for everyone throughout the day, with the possible exception of dinner. A slave woman often came home from a long day in the fields and prepared dinner for her family. If she were allowed a plot of land for a garden, she used her produce to supplement the rations provided by her owner.[56] On many occasions, a slave woman had little time

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[54]Merrill D. Peterson, ed., Thomas Jefferson: Writings (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984), 1021.

[55]Kemble, Journal, 169, 301.

[56]Kiple and King, Black Diaspora, 80-81; evidence suggests that the slave diet may have been sufficient in quantity (calories) but not in quality (nutrients) and may have caused a variety of illnesses. Kiple and Kiple, "Slave Child Mortality," 296: "antebellum plantations must have abounded with somewhat deprived children who exhibited mild

to prepare the meal. For slave children who were fed improperly while under the care of a nurse, the lack of a well-balanced meal at dinner was a serious problem. Thus slaves could often get a better-balanced diet when the master provided communal meals. James W. C. Pennington complained in his narrative of his days as a slave that due to the lack of parental care and attention, he often suffered from hunger.[57] Annie Row said that she had been so hungry as a child that she took food away from a dog and was whipped for it.[58]

While their mothers were busy with their labor for the owner, slave children were sometimes fed in a primitive manner. The cook placed on the ground a large tray containing food--such as corn-meal mush--and the children were called to eat. They gathered at the tray and devoured the food either with their hands, oyster shells, or some other device, but rarely with a spoon or other utensil. Jane Holloway and George Strickland both remembered troughs being used to hold the children's food. Holloway used a wooden spoon to eat her meal, but Strickland and his friends used their hands, gourds, or mussel shells.[59]

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cases of kwashiorkor" (protein-calorie malnutrition).

[57]James W. C. Pennington, "The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington" in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium, ed. William Loren Katz (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 2.

[58]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 136.

[59]Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 6, Jane

Frederick Douglass described the process as follows:

> We were not regularly allowanced. Our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called *mush*. It was put into a large wooden tray or trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush; some with oyster-shells, others with pieces of shingle, some with naked hands, and none with spoons. He that ate fastest got most; he that was strongest secured the best place; and few left the trough satisfied.[60]

Such conditions did not exist on every plantation, however. Louis Watkins's owner in Tennessee served his slaves their meals in a dining room.[61] Furthermore, many children received more than just corn-meal mush for their meal. For breakfast they might receive hominy and molasses, and for lunch soup containing a variety of vegetables and salt pork or small pieces of meat.[62] Seasonal fruit as well as eggs were also available. Jacob Branch remembered that the children could go to the smokehouse almost any time and "get all de cracklin's or sweet 'taters" they wanted because the owner wanted them to be fat and healthy.[63] Will Adams's

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Holloway, 188; Strickland, 359.

[60]Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave contained in Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies (New York: The Library of America, 1994), 33.

[61]Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Louis Watkins, 28.

[62]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 288-89; J. F. Smith, Slavery and Rice Culture, 117; Lunsford Lane, "The Narrative of Lunsford Lane," in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium, 13; Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi, 65.

[63]Silverthorne, Plantation Life in Texas, 95.

master was also concerned that his slave children had plenty to eat: "I 'members him like it was yesterday coming to the 'quarters' with his stick and asking us, 'Had your breakfast?' We say 'Yes Sah' (Sir). Then he'd ask us if we had enough or wanted anymore. It look like he took a pleasure in seeing us eat. At dinner, when the fiel' hands come in, it was the same way."[64]

When owners did not provide their slaves with adequate provisions, the slaves often stole food from them or from nearby plantations or farms. Many slaves believed that taking from their owner was not stealing and could be justified by their hunger.[65]

Just as many slave children suffered from lack of proper nutrition, they also suffered from lack of proper clothing. While an owner conceivably could be ignorant of proper nutrition and therefore not provide a well-balanced diet, lack of clothing and shoes was a sign of his lack of concern for the health and well-being of his slaves. While slave women made cloth and clothes, most plantations had to have some cloth that was not manufactured on the premises. A slave family often was required to make its own cloth or to purchase clothing to supplement what the master provided.[66]

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[64]Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 2, Will Adams, 12.

[65]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 136.

[66]Kolchin, American Slavery, 114. Slave women made homespun cloth to use in making their clothing, or their owners bought "Negro cloth" that was manufactured in the

Children wore long shirts or frocks and had no shoes until they worked in the field. Practically no evidence exists to indicate that slaves wore underwear or socks. Slave children on some plantations were kept in a state close to nudity. In some parts of the South, children were not required to wear anything at all.[67]

Frederick Douglass remembered his childhood days on a Maryland plantation as spent wearing a coarse tow-linen shirt with no trousers, stockings, jacket, or shoes. Children under the age of ten were allotted two of these shirts a year and if they wore out, the children had to go naked until the next allotment was given out. Austin Smith wore his "long-tailed shirt" until he was sixteen; Stearlin Arnwine got his first pants at age fourteen. Although shoes were often ill-fitting and painful to wear, going barefoot caused problems for slave children, especially in the winter. They often had to endure frostbite on their feet.[68] Frederick Douglass complained that "my feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes." Scott Bond remembered that his mother put hot tallow ("a cure all") in the cracks on

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North specifically for use as slave clothing.

[67]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 139; Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 80.

[68]Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 2, Austin Smith, 133; Stearlin Arnwine, 85; Blassingame, Slave Community, 179; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 291-92; Frederick Douglass, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (New York: Bonanza Books, 1962), 55-56.

his feet and burned a blister; she cried because she had hurt him so badly. Hookworm and other illnesses were also caused by children not wearing protective shoes.[69]

Although slave housing varied from area to area, it was typically small, crowded, and dirty, with few furnishings. If very crowded, the houses were dangerous for young children who got underfoot.[70] Cabins were placed some distance from the owner's house. On larger holdings, the slave quarters were often small villages where the slaves lived apart from the owner.[71] Harriet Martineau made some harsh observations of a slave quarter she visited in Alabama. "It is something between a haunt of monkeys and a dwelling-place of human beings. The natural good taste, so remarkable in free negroes, is here extinguished. Their small, dingy, untidy houses, their cribs, the children crouching around the fire, the animal deportment of the grown-up, the brutish chagrins and enjoyments of the old, were all loathsome. There was some relief in seeing the children playing in the sun, and sometimes fowls clucking and strutting round the houses; but otherwise, a walk through a lunatic asylum is far less painful than a visit to

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[69]Bremner, Children and Youth, 375-76; Douglass, Narrative, 33; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Scott Bond, 27; Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 82-83.

[70]Silverthorne, Plantation Life in Texas, 78.

[71]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 138.

the slave quarter of an estate."[72]

Fanny Kemble agreed with Martineau. On her husband's plantations in Georgia, Kemble visited a number of slave cabins and infirmaries where she encouraged the inhabitants to clean up their surroundings and themselves. She wrote, "Such of these dwellings as I visited today were filthy and wretched in the extreme. . . . Firewood and shavings lay littered about the floors, while the half-naked children were cowering round two or three smouldering cinders. . To these hardly human little beings I addressed my remonstrances about the filth, cold, and unnecessary wretchedness of their room, bidding the older boys and girls kindle up the fire, sweep the floor, and expel the poultry."[73]

While slaves lived in a range of conditions, Martineau and Kemble observed the more typical situation, especially for the early nineteenth century. Housing usually was barely adequate for survival. Physicians, travelers, and even slave owners began to realize that the filthy and crowded state of the slave cabins promoted disease. During the 1840s and 1850s, many slave holders began requiring that slaves regularly clean their homes.[74]

Contemporary observers differed in their assessments of

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[72]Posey, Alabama in the 1830s, 34.

[73]Kemble, Journal, 67-68.

[74]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 294-95; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 526-27.

blame for the slaves' living conditions. Some of them believed that the slaves were too "brutish" (to use Martineau's term) to keep themselves or their homes clean and tidy. Others, like Kemble, believed that the slaves needed to be taught better hygiene and required to clean their homes, but they firmly condemned slavery and slaveowners for continuing the slaves' circumstances. They believed that the slaveowners should provide more cabins to minimize crowding, better materials, and instruction for their slaves so that the slaves could improve their surroundings. However, long, physically hard labor (as well as environmental factors such as livestock, wildlife, insects, and the weather intruding in their homes) made it almost impossible for slaves to expend the energy it would take to maintain a high standard of neatness and cleanliness. Thus, slaves continued to live in small, crowded, and dirty surroundings throughout the antebellum period.[75]

Slave children were subjected to "wretched" conditions every day. The care received during the childhood years was rudimentary at best. Poor hygiene, inadequate nutrition, poor health, insufficient clothing, and substandard housing resulted in abject squalor for many of these children.

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[75]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 292-95; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 528.

CHAPTER II

THE FACTS OF LIFE: THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY UNDER THE RULE OF MANY MASTERS

The treatment of slave children involved more than just the care and physical provisions made for them. The relationship that the children had with the rest of the plantation community was important as well. Many slaves' most powerful memories concerned their relationships with others. Slave children did not spend a great deal of time with their parents. If their fathers lived on nearby plantations, at best they saw them about once or twice a week. If they lived on the same plantation, they could spend more time together. The same was true of time with their mothers. If they lived on the same plantation, they saw each other every day, but only for a limited amount of time. However, most slaves appear to have lived with both parents.

According to Allan Kulikoff, more than half of slave children lived in two-parent households in the Chesapeake region toward the end of the eighteenth century. Ann Patton Malone found that from 1810 to 1864, slightly fewer than half of sampled Louisiana slaves of all ages lived as

members of two-parent nuclear families, as parents or children, with the percentages of slaves in female-headed single-parent households decreasing over time. In Randolph B. Campbell's sample, sixty percent of former slaves in the 1930s remembered living with both parents on the same plantation, and another nine percent remembered that their fathers lived nearby. In general, the larger the slaveholding, the greater stability afforded its domestic organization.[76]

In spite of the time apart that slave families had to endure, strong feelings developed between many slave children and their parents. Parents were able to teach their children how to conduct themselves, especially under slavery. Henry Box Brown's mother taught him "not to steal, and not to lie, and to behave himself in other respects." Parents also made every effort to teach their children to be careful what they said around white people, including the white children who were their playmates. Some of them also tried to instill a sense of morality in their children and to teach them to lead Christian lives.[77]

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[76]Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 11, 369; Ann Patton Malone, Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 254, 260, 269; Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 156.

[77]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 348; Blassingame, Slave Community, 181, 186-87, 190-91; Henry Box Brown, "Narrative of Henry Box Brown," in Afro-American History Series, Collection 7: Slave Narratives (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc.), 16.

Parents also taught family history and told stories and sang songs that contained lessons about dealing with slavery and life in general. Stories and songs taught children about religion, morals, family, and survival. The "trickster" tales demonstrated various methods of coping with the world. Peter J. Parish has written of "an inevitable contradiction between the amoral strategy for survival recommended by the trickster tales and the standards and values taught by the moral tales or the spirituals." Slave stories tended to emphasize the individual and his or her ability to survive and outsmart those in power.[78]

To some extent, slave children were taught to be passive in the face of abuse and punishment. Nevertheless, some tried to defend relatives who were being abused. Frederick Douglass remembered an incident in which a slave mother was being flogged and her young children were attacking her oppressor and screaming, "Let my mammy go!" Jacob Branch claimed that when he saw his mother beaten, "many's the time I edges up and tries to take some of them licks off my mama."[79] The bond between parent and child was so strong that in some instances slaves refused to escape when the opportunity presented itself because they did not want to

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[78]Parish, Slavery, 36-37; Kolchin, American Slavery, 154-55.

[79]Douglass, Life and Times, 51-52; Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 160.

leave their relatives, especially their mothers. Mothers were also less inclined to run away because of the difficulty in escaping with their children, and few mothers wanted to leave their children behind. Often runaways merely tried to escape to places where they had relatives.[80]

Slaveowners also played a role in teaching and raising slave children; some were especially concerned that the children learn religion. Elizabeth Edmonia Cooke of Hanover County, Virginia, taught her slave children on Sundays. In her journal from 1855 to 1858, she complained that the children attended irregularly, were sometimes tardy, and misbehaved. "Assembled my little class in the ev[en]ing. Attendance small one great hindrance to my teaching these children is that by the time they get old enough to receive instruction they are sent out to work on the Farm or are so situated that I cannot compel or control their attendance." Cooke felt that her efforts met with limited success:

> 4 of our servants applied to their master for permission to be baptized which he granted. Many of them have been, as little children, under my Sunday instruction, but as soon as they were old enough to go out to work they were no longer under my control & quitted, except in one instance. I believe them to be entirely ignorant of the doctrines & duties of Religion & as unfit for the rights [sic] of Baptism as any heathen child in the wilds of Africa. 2 or 3 of them are not more than 12 or 13 years old.[81]

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[80]William W. Brown, "Narrative of William W. Brown," in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium, 31-32; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 112-13.

[81]Cooke, "Journal," 58, 74. See also 25, 29, 31, 35, 44, 58, 74, 79, 80, 81, 110, 117.

Slaveowners had a special status in slave children's minds. Even if the children did not fully comprehend the meaning of the relationship between master and slave or owner and property, as they grew older they undoubtedly knew that the master and mistress were in control of the plantation. Martha Griffiths Browne remembered her old master vaguely as a large, kindly, venerable-looking man who gave her buttered bread when she had finished her daily task. She also remembered a hickory cane being shaken over her head two or three times with the promise of a good "thrashing" at some future time. On the other hand, as a small child, Frederick Douglass had no conception of his master, whom he had never seen. His master was spoken of in terms of deep reverence and, thus, his knowledge of this mysterious man consisted of a name spoken with fear. This person, who evoked such feelings, only allowed the children to live with their grandmother for a limited time, and then he whisked them away to live with him. Such a sinister vision, coupled with a fear of the unknown, undoubtedly was a dreadful experience for a small child. Douglass wished he could remain small all his life; as he learned more about his master, it increased his dread of being taken away from his grandparents.[82]

Because slave children were often assigned as playmates

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[82]Martha Griffiths Browne, Autobiography of a Female Slave (1857; rpt. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 9; Douglass, Life and Times, 30-31.

for the master's children, the relationships that developed between them were important in child development. On some occasions, the slave children were unaware of the social and legal differences between them and their white friends. Lunsford Lane, who grew up on a North Carolina plantation, "knew no difference" between himself and the white children, "nor did they seem to know any in turn. Sometime my master would come out and give a biscuit to me and another to one of his white boys; but I did not perceive the difference between us." Under such conditions, young slaves, like Frederick Douglass and Lunsford Lane, often did not understand their status as slaves. As they matured, however, the relationship with white children changed and the realization of slavery came home to them. Adolescence was a difficult time and tested these bonds. The distinctions between slave and free and black and white became more apparent with the change in status caused by approaching adulthood and increased work requirements for the slave. When the slave child began to labor for the master, changes appeared in his relationship with his friends. The white children began to order the slave child around and were encouraged to do so by the master. The social divisions between slave and master became clear for a child who previously had considered himself no different from his white counterparts.[83]

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[83]Lane, "Narrative," 6-8.

According to Eugene Genovese, the realization often came when the white children started school. Not only were the slave children denied the opportunity to attend school with their white playmates, they also took on a new role as they began to work as body servants.[84] "When my young master went three miles to school, he rode a horse," recalled Henry Johnson of Georgia. "I had to walk alongside de horse to carry his books, den go home and fetch him a hot dinner for noon and go back at night to carry dem books."[85]

Children who were playmates sometimes remained close as they matured. Usually these close bonds persisted only between white children and slaves who became their personal servants. A trusted playmate from childhood often became a trusted servant as an adult in the household. Mary Chesnut's mother had a trusted slave named Hetty who had been her maid since she was six years old. Helen Dodge Irving, niece of Washington Irving, traveled in Virginia and North Carolina in 1831-1832 and observed that "in general, each of the children have one [slave] assigned to them, who they begin at a very early age to consider as their own exclusive property and though this would seem, and no doubt sometimes does foster an overbearing disposition, by giving it the exercise of authority without judgement to guide . . . in many instances it seems only to give a stronger

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[84]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 517.

[85]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 517.

interest in that particular slave and to lead them to greater indulgences."[86]

Although some slave children were fortunate to have had indulgent playmates and owners, most slave children did not have a happy childhood. Many slaves vividly recalled as children seeing their parents or close relatives flogged. Oliver Bell's first memory was of seeing his mother whipped. Her dress was pulled down to her waist, and she was made to lie down across the floor. Bell remembered crying while she was beaten. Charles Ball's witnessing of his mother's flogging when he was four years old remained vivid in his mind forty-seven years later. In his narrative, James W. C. Pennington related how a six-year-old girl sobbed when she saw her elderly father being flogged by their master's son, only to be driven away by the master. In the 1930s, William Colbert was over ninety years old but still became visibly upset recounting the story of how his master had tried to break his brother January's spirit with a severe beating. When Colbert's brother did not cry out, the master said, "What's de matter wid you, nigger? Don't it hurt?"[87]

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[86]Kolchin, American Slavery, 117; Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary, eds., A Diary From Dixie, As Written By Mary Boykin Chesnut (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1961), 222; Helen Dodge Irving Collection, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. See Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 514-19 for a discussion of the relations between black and white children on a plantation.

[87]Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 6, Oliver Bell, 28; Blassingame, Slave Community, pp. 186-87; Pennington, "The Fugitive Blacksmith," 10; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 6, William Colbert, 81-82.

Perhaps the most frustrating and devastating development in the life of slave children occurred when they realized that the master was in total control. There was nothing slave children could do to escape the master's tyranny or the awareness of their own inability to act. Such feelings were difficult for slave children to handle. As a young slave, Austin Stewart had to endure watching a white man flog his sister. That he could do nothing for her without endangering both of their lives weighed heavily on him.[88]

Like Martha Griffiths Browne, slave children were often threatened with beatings. James W. C. Pennington lived in constant dread of an overseer named Blackstone. Blackstone always carried a long hickory whip with him, and he kept a supply of three or four as backups. Pennington found one of these whips lying on the ground, assumed it had been thrown away, and used it as a toy horse. When the overseer saw him with the stick, he beat him. From that day on, Pennington noticed the pleasure the overseer took in being cruel to him. "He would show how much he delighted in cruelty by chasing me from my play with threats and imprecations. I have lain for hours in a wood, or behind a fence, to hide from his eye." Bill McNeil remembered that when he was a slave he received lots of whippings and he claimed that the overseer whipped whenever he felt out of sorts. At age ten, Henry Clay Bruce was punished by the overseer every time he

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[88]Blassingame, Slave Community, 186-87.

was caught napping when he was supposed to be working. The only whippings Olmsted saw in Virginia were of "wild, lazy children, as they are being broke in to work."[89]

However, some masters relieved themselves of the responsibility of punishing slave children by giving slave parents control over their families. When a child transgressed the rules of the plantation, the master requested that the parents administer punishment. Aunt Lucinda Miller claimed that her master whipped the adult slaves but not the children. Henry Clay Bruce recalled situations in which young slaves had violated important rules and the master had gone to their parents, presented his case, and demanded that they take action. South Carolinian Abram Harris's master "told us mammies er pappies ter do de whippin er de chillun en de older boys en gals."[90]

Such a situation could be very favorable for the owners. First, on a very basic level, the owners did not have to physically exert themselves in order to ensure that slave children were disciplined. Second, the parents are the ones inflicting the pain on their children, so the parents, rather than the owners, could be viewed by their children as

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[89]Pennington, "The Fugitive Blacksmith," 3; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 3, pt. 3, Bill McNeil, 165; Henry Clay Bruce, The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years A Slave, Twenty-Nine Years A Free Man (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 22; Olmsted, Seaboard, vol. 1, 163.

[90]Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 3, pt. 3, Aunt Lucinda Miller, 191; Bruce, New Man, 41; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 2, vol. 9, Abram Harris, 170.

being mean. A few owners took full advantage of the impunity imparted by third party disciplining of slave children. Adrianna W. Kerns belonged to a man who made her and another young slave "switch" each other. When they cried out to him during the beating he would say, "I ain't doing nothing to you."[91]

Furthermore, an owner's requirement that slave parents keep their children in line placed the responsibility for the children's behavior firmly on the parents' shoulders. If the children were exceedingly unruly, then the parents, as well as the children, might have to answer for it.[92]

The strictness that slave parents imposed on their children was necessary in a slaveholding society. Although slave parents undoubtedly would have had a genuine concern that their children behave properly, they also knew that eventually their children would have to suffer under the owner's or overseer's lash, so teaching them to behave at an early age could save them from a severe beating--or worse--at the hands of whites later on. When four years old, Lucy McCullough's mother whipped her for being disrespectful to their mistress. Lucy's mother was the household cook and the mistress scolded her "'bout de sorry way mammy done

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[91]Wilma King, Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 94-5; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 9, pt. 3 & 4, Adrianna W. Kerns, 193.

[92]W. King, Stolen Childhood, 94.

clean de chitlins." Lucy took exception to her mother's upbraiding: "Doan you know Mammy is boss ef dis hyar kitchen. You can't come a fussin' in hyar." "Mammy" took a switch "en gin ticklin' my laigs."[93]

Slave parents were also aware that particularly recalcitrant slaves were likely to be sold. If they could teach their children proper behavior and respect for authority from a young age, they could be more hopeful of keeping their family together later on.

Slave parents and other members of the slave community frequently whipped children for a variety of reasons--misbehaving, doing poor work, or being disrespectful to adults of any race. Mollie Dawson remembered that children "got good right now" whenever their parents gave them a look out of the corner of the eye.[94] Members of the slave community supported each other in their efforts to raise their children. Tennessee Johnson, a former slave in Louisiana, remembered that slaves in the quarter looked out for each other's children and whipped them when necessary. Lewis Brown of Arkansas elaborated further: "In them days, folks raised one another's chillun;" "you" whipped errant

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[93]Fox-Genovese, Plantation Household, 158-59.

[94]James Mellon, ed., Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember, An Oral History (New York: Avon Books, 1988), 425; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 510-11.

children and then sent them home to their mothers.[95]

Slave children who were favorites of the master or his family often took advantage of their parents' subordinate status to appeal to the master or mistress to save them from parental anger. Amanda Smith ran and wrapped herself in her old mistress's apron for protection from her mother and the switch she was carrying.[96] The slave child of Mary Chesnut's maid Molly dropped her baby sister and was receiving a "switching" when Chesnut intervened.[97] Fourteen-year-old Evelyn was happy to become Elizabeth Meriwether's house servant because she wanted to travel and get away from her mother who beat her. Evelyn believed that she would be better treated by Meriwether than by her own mother. Incidentally, Meriwether noticed that Evelyn enjoyed torturing kittens, puppies, and chickens and asserted that there was nothing wrong with it because they had no feelings.[98]

When the parents had the primary authority over discipline for their children and appeal to the master or his family was not a viable alternative, children had a clear-cut notion of who was going to administer punishment

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[95]Malone, Sweet Chariot, 234; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Lewis Brown, 57.

[96]Blassingame, Slave Community, 178, 185.

[97]C. Vann Woodward, ed., Mary Chesnut's Civil War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 641-42.

[98]Fox-Genovese, Plantation Household, 142-43.

for wrongdoing. But when children could get sympathy from the master's family, they knew they could undercut their parents' authority by appealing to a higher power. In such instances, children could play the adults against each other to avoid punishment. Thus children, knowing that punishment could be avoided, were freer to bend the rules and to challenge their parents' authority. This could serve as a valuable lesson for the future as slaves matured and learned to manipulate those with power over them.

In the vast majority of cases, however, slave children did not have the luxury of flouting authority. Owners and overseers, as well as other whites, including white children, freely exercised their authority in administering punishment. Parents also exercised their right to discipline their children. When others in the slave community beat each others' children, it could very well seem as if slave children had to watch out for everyone. Moreover, Frederick Douglass judged slavery's effects on society and culture in this way: "Everybody, in the south, wants the privilege of whipping somebody else." Being at the bottom of a large pecking order, slave children gave themselves the "privilege" of whipping each other by playing one of their favorite games called "hide-the-switch." Julia Blanks of Texas claimed that "after you was hit several

times it didn't hurt much."[99]

In addition to disciplinarian, parents played other roles--that of comforter for their beaten children or reinforcer of the owner's authority. When an owner or an overseer beat a child, he knew that the child's parents might offer solace and the child could come to view punishment by whites as an injustice. It was also possible that the parents would tell the child to correct his or her behavior and do as he or she was told in the future. Slave children knew that adult slaves could be beaten for infractions, and undoubtedly their parents used that fact as a warning to their children.

The impact of witnessing their parents being beaten affected slave children's development in a number of ways. First, the image of their parents receiving a beating may have reinforced children's views of corporal punishment as unjust. As the parents begged and pleaded for mercy or fought defiantly against this oppression, they were an example to their children. Slave children typically looked up to their parents and saw them as superiors. To see their parents--who punished them and provided them with love and support--beaten by someone else created confusing images in the children's minds. Their parents punished them for

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[99]Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom contained in Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies (New York: The Library of America, 1994), 165; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 505-6.

wrongdoing to teach them proper behavior; to see their parents beaten told children that proper behavior could not be attained or that even their parents could be "bad." Children can understand that some of their behavior is related to their status as children; thus they can envision their behavior changing as they mature. For adults to be punished in the same manner as children were, usually more severely, could have suggested that proper behavior was an unattainable goal. Accordingly, for slave children, the best alternative was to avoid punishment by not getting caught rather than by attempting to comply with the rules.

Second, the parents' authority could be severely undermined when their children saw them being beaten. Because their parents could be physically held accountable to the master, this reality helped to reinforce the dilemma in slave children's minds as to who "really was in charge" and to whom ultimate obedience was owed. Furthermore, the beating of adults conveyed to children that the possibility of punishment from whites would be with them for life. Additionally, when adults complained of cruelty from whites, it set a double standard in their children's minds: why did parents punish them when those same parents complained of punishment from the owner or overseer?

Finally, although children could be punished by their parents <u>and</u> their master or overseer, their parents were punished <u>only</u> by the master or overseer. Thus the children knew that someday punishment inflicted by their parents

would come to an end. Such knowledge could have made them wonder why their parents' authority over them would one day be reduced while people who were not members of their family could continue to do with them as they pleased. At some point in their lives, slave children probably realized that their color, heritage, or birth was responsible for their predicament.

The emotional turmoil slave children underwent after they received their first flogging from their master or overseer weighed heavily on them. Young slaves often wanted to run away or seek revenge after receiving their first beating. Others turned to their parents for help but found that the latter could do very little. Jacob Stroyer received his first beating after having been thrown from the back of a horse. He had never been punished by anyone but his parents, and he felt that his oppressor had no right to touch him. He ran to his father hoping for vindication, but his father told him bluntly that there was nothing he could do. His father advised him to go back to his work and do the best he could to avoid future punishment. Unsatisfied with this response, Stroyer went to his mother, who confronted the man who had beaten him. Her efforts on her son's behalf earned her a beating and her son a second beating. Stroyer expected his mother to come to his aid again, but she did not. "Then the idea first came to me that I, with my dear father and mother and the rest of my fellow negroes, was doomed to cruel treatment through life,

and was defenceless."[100]

Once faced with the reality of physical beatings administered to them and to their parents, slave children had four possible responses. First, they could try to fight the next time they were beaten. But fighting back rarely resulted in better treatment; usually, it meant more severe punishment. Additionally, parents tried to discourage their children from responding in this manner, knowing the consequences. Second, the children could decide to endure their treatment but to get back at their masters in some way. Slaves often did less work than their masters demanded of them, and they often did poor work. This passive resistance reflected the notion that their labor was for the master, not for them, and therefore, not doing what was wanted was the best way to hurt the master. Slaves often stole things from their masters in retaliation for whippings. They also broke equipment, set fires, and tried to hinder the work on the plantation in other ways.[101]

Third, slave children could decide to live with their fate. This response was borne of despair. Faith in a benevolent God who loved them and looked out for them helped

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[100]Jacob Stroyer, "My Life in the South," in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium, 17-18.

[101]Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 32; Kolchin, American Slavery, 157; Gerald W. Mullin, Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 34-7.

many of them deal with their plight. Clinging to the hope of emancipation also helped slaves reconcile themselves to their predicament. But this response was chosen when the slave felt utterly defenseless in this world.

Finally, slave children could decide to escape. Often slaves ran away soon after being flogged. Sometimes they resolved to endure harsh treatment in the short run while waiting for the opportunity to leave. Nonetheless, they had made up their minds that they would not live in bondage for the rest of their lives.[102]

Much of the lives of slave children was filled with conflicting notions of their status. On one hand, they were an important and cherished part of their immediate families. On the other hand, they were the property of their owners who ruled over them, often arbitrarily. When Jacob Stroyer spent his time as a child on his master's plantation, he and the other slave children were schooled in how to address the master and mistress. Before his master and mistress visited "their little negroes," each child had to be washed, dressed in his or her best clothes, and "drilled in the art of addressing our expected visitors. The boys were required to bend the body forward with head down, and rest the body on the left foot, and scrape the right foot backward on the ground, while uttering the words, 'how dy Massie and Missie.' The girls were required to use the same words,

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[102]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 110.

accompanied with a courtesy." Before the visit, each child had his or her hair combed, but after their visitors had left, their hair was neglected until the next visit.[103] Because such a fuss was not made on any other occasion, the children had to conclude that these white people were somehow special to deserve such deference.

Although some slave children were unaware of their condition of servitude until they were older, most were painfully aware from an early age of their lower status as compared with whites. Knowledge of beatings and other crimes committed against fellow slaves by whites obviously showed them that slaves were treated as inferior. Equally symbolic of their lowly status was the refusal to teach them to read or write. Slave children had to be aware of this double standard when they watched their white playmates go to school and knew that they could not go with them. Some slaves were taught how to read, but this often had to be done in secret, and well under ten percent of slaves were literate.[104]

Much depended on who taught the slaves and whether or not they were taught to read in groups or individually. Philip Vickers Fithian taught a slave boy named Dennis along with Robert Carter III's children. Fithian started teaching Dennis "at his Fathers request." But Dennis could only come

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[103]Stroyer, My Life in the South, 12-13.

[104]Fox-Genovese, Plantation Household, 156.

to school "as he finds oppertunity." Henry Clay Bruce was good friends with one of his master's sons, who taught him how to read and spell. When his friend's aunt discovered what he had been doing, she told his father and insisted that it was a crime to teach a slave to read. For a boy who enjoyed learning, it must have been a devastating blow to have this pleasure taken away from him. Susan Merritt's mistress hit her with a whip when she caught one of the family's daughters teaching her to read. Fanny Kemble vowed to teach sixteen-year-old Aleck to read in secret. Louis Watkins's owner, on the other hand, hired a white tutor to teach his slaves. The tutor came on Sundays and taught them to read, write, and "figure." The slaves were further encouraged to read books and look at pictures outside of regular work hours.[105]

Not all states had laws prohibiting the teaching of slaves, and many owners did not object to their slaves learning a few basics of reading and writing. During the last thirty years of slavery, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia were the only four states with a total prohibition on teaching slaves to read and write. Other states had such laws for briefer periods or banned the teaching of assembled slaves but not of individuals.[106] As

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[105]Farish, Philip Vickers Fithian, 182-83; Bruce, New Man, 25; Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 175; Kemble, Journal, 271-72; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Louis Watkins, 28.

[106]Kolchin, American Slavery, 129.

the Bruce and Merritt examples illustrate, it was not unusual for the owner's children to teach their playmates how to read and write. Not all slave children wanted to learn. Liza Jones preferred to go out and play and cried when her master's daughter made her stay inside to be taught.[107]

Slave children were frequently made aware of the differences between them and their white playmates. Many slaves were treated cruelly by white children, who were often encouraged in their actions by the masters. Coupled with the harsh treatment that they could receive from white adults, these conditions made them painfully aware from an early age that they were in an inferior and degraded position.[108] Thomas Jefferson criticized slavery for the negative effects that it had on white children as well as blacks. He believed that slavery morally degraded blacks and seriously compromised the character of white children. In his Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson wrote:

> The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it. . . . The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a

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[107]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 175.

[108]Blassingame, Slave Community, 185.

> prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances.[109]

Decades later, Olmsted agreed that slavery was detrimental to white children. He saw an eight-year-old son of a slaveowner beating and cursing a puppy and believed "his tone was an evident imitation of his father's mode of dealing with his slaves." White children often did not limit their authority to animals. Rachel Harris remembered being whipped by white children as well as adults. Southerners other than Thomas Jefferson worried about the effects of slavery on their children. They believed that growing up as part of a slaveholding family made their children, particularly their sons, stubborn and overbearing.[110]

In 1797, Benjamin Henry Latrobe found fault with slavery because of the ill effects he believed that it had on young girls. He wrote:

> Were I to chuse a Wife by manners I would chuse a Virginian, and yet let me tell you there are things done & seen in Virginia which would shock the delicacy of a bold Englishwoman, a free Frenchwoman, & a wanton Italian. What do you think, Madam, of the naked little boys & girls running about every plantation. What do you think of the Girls & Women, waiting upon your daughters in presence of Gentlemen with their bosoms uncovered. What think you of the known promiscuous intercourse of your servants, the perpetual pregnancies of your young servant girls, fully exhibited to your children, who will know,

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[109]Peterson, Thomas Jefferson: Writings, 269, 288.

[110]Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 201; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 2, vol. 9, Rachel Harris, 179; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 518-19.

that marriage exists not among them?[111]

In the 1830s Fanny Kemble was dismayed over the effects she feared slavery would have on her daughter Sarah:

> I do not think that a residence on a slave plantation is likely to be peculiarly advantageous to a child like my oldest. I was observing her today among her swarthy worshipers, for they follow her as such, and saw, with dismay, the universal eagerness with which they sprang to obey her little gestures of command. She said something about a swing, and in less than five minutes headman Frank had erected it for her, and a dozen young slaves were ready to swing little 'missis.' [Elizabeth], think of learning to rule despotically your fellow creatures before the first lesson of self-government has been well spelled over! It makes me tremble; but I shall find a remedy, or remove myself and the child from this misery and ruin.[112]

Some southerners left records of the steps they took to guard their children against the negative effects on character that slavery was feared to have. According to Eugene Genovese, many planters allowed adult slaves "to inflict light physical punishment on misbehaving white children" in order to insure that their offspring would not become too overbearing before reaching adulthood. Southern journals of the antebellum period also encouraged planters to raise their children to protect their slaves and treat them with benevolence. This message did not always have the desired effect; white children often tormented black

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[111]Talbot Hamlin, Benjamin Henry Latrobe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), from Latrobe manuscript journals, May 22, 1797, 572.

[112]Kemble, Journal, 93.

children with impunity.[113]

Another aspect of slave children's lives that would have affected their view of themselves was the knowledge that they could be sold away from their families. Martha Griffiths Browne experienced the trauma of being sold as a child: "A tall, hard-looking man came up to me, very roughly seized my arm, bade me open my mouth; examined my teeth; felt of my limbs; made me run a few yards; ordered me to jump; and, being well satisfied with my activity, said to Master Edward, 'I will take her.'" In spite of this degrading treatment, Browne was far more upset over being separated from her mother. She remembered her master having more consideration for his old gray mare and her colt than he had for her: "I had yet to learn that the white man dared do all that his avarice might suggest; and there was no human tribunal where the outcast African could pray for 'right'!"[114]

Browne's statement bore witness to the dichotomy that existed between people of different skin colors. The white man dared do whatever he wished, while the "outcast African" had to suffer. Skin color was always a determining factor in how one was treated. From a very early age, slave children heard their parents speak of "white" people. They were told to watch their tongues around "white" people

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[113]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 518-19.

[114]M. G. Browne, Autobiography, 13-14.

because "white" people used the lash. But the reference to color was not limited to the word "white"; slaves made reference to their color as well. Slave mothers sang songs to their children such as the following:

> To a cabin in woodland drear
> You've come a mammy's heart to cheer,
> In this ole slave cabin,
> Your hands my heart strings grabbin,
> Jes lay your head upon my bres,
> An snuggle close an res an res,
> My little colored chile.
>
> Yo daddy ploughs ole massa's corn,
> Yo mammy does the cooking,
> She'll give dinner to her hungry chile
> When nobody is a lookin'
> Don't be ashamed my chile, I beg,
> Case you was hatched from a buzzard's egg;
> My little colored chile.[115]

This song was filled with statements about slavery and color. Reference to the mother's "colored" child was accompanied by the statement "you was hatched from a buzzard's egg." The implications of an inferior status in life could hardly have been lost on a slave child. Despite the mother begging her colored child not to be ashamed of who he or she was, the fact that she asked such a thing implied that maybe the child would in fact tend to be ashamed of it, or at least that others might consider a black slave's position shameful. One thing is certain: it is highly unlikely that the plantation mistress sang similar songs to her child or referred to him or her as "my little white child."

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[115]Blassingame, Slave Community, 183.

Finally, slave children had to be aware of their difference in status from whites in that they were not allowed to have their own last names. Sometimes masters gave their slaves surnames, but usually slaves did not officially have them. Slave children did not take their last names from their fathers. If their fathers belonged to different owners, their fathers' last names might be different. Jacob Stroyer assumed his father's real last name after Emancipation, something he had been unable to do when he was a slave. Many slaves secretly took surnames for the sake of family unity and dignity, but were careful not to speak them in front of whites.[116] Sometimes masters gave their slaves first names as well as a means of control. Overseers could also name slave children, but did so with less frequency than the owners. Slaves often gave their children secret "basket" names to counteract owner control and perhaps to instill a sense of pride in the children's familial heritage.[117]

Slave children were most likely aware that they were different from the white people around them. Many aspects of their lives were tainted with the stigma of being property. Every day, through their hard labor for their owners, their parents showed them what they could expect in

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[116]Kolchin, American Slavery, 140; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 445 n.25.

[117]Stroyer, My Life in the South, 14; Malone, Sweet Chariot, 231-32; Gutman discussed naming practices extensively in Black Family, chs. 5-6.

their future. Although their early childhoods may have been pleasant and free from much labor, slave children knew when they began to take on more tasks that their status compared with their owners was defined by the economics and sociology of chattel slavery. Old playmates often grew up to become hard masters who required long days of toil. Regardless of their feelings of attachment to their family, friends, and home, they knew they could be sold at any time, even if their owners did not wish it (due to bankruptcy, foreclosure, or the death of the owner). They also knew that their skills and fecundity dictated their value; like the livestock and crops their masters owned, they knew they had a market price, a price determined by white people.

CHAPTER III

A CHILDHOOD LOST: ENFORCED LABOR AND SERVITUDE

Slave children were valuable elements of the slave economy. They contributed much to the labor supply of their masters. From an early age, they were subject to the same conditions that prevailed for the adult slaves: they were hired out, beaten for poor work, sold or given away at the master's discretion, and required to put in long hours of toil for little or no reward. Even though slave children may not have performed work as backbreaking as that of adult slaves, they were required to perform repetitious, monotonous, or simple tasks that required endurance. Some tasks were the same as those demanded of adults, while others were specifically done by children. The vast majority of slaves, young and old, worked in agriculture or related occupations.[118] Whatever was demanded, the children were responsible for performing competent work and ultimately subject to the will of an overseer or task-master.

Until the age of six or so, slave children were usually left in the care of old women or older children, or they

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[118]Parish, Slavery, 13.

were left to roam around unattended. Frederick Douglass believed that the first few years of a slave child's life were "as full of sweet content as those of the most favored and petted white children of the slaveholder. . . he literally runs wild."[119] Henry Clay Bruce remembered that slave children had nothing to do but "eat, play, and grow" until they were old enough to work. He and his friends spent their time hunting and fishing. However, Harriet Jacobs's infant daughter, Louisa Matilda, was left unattended on the grounds of the plantation while her mother performed her duties within the household. Jacobs was forced to listen for hours to her daughter's crying without being able to attend to her. Moses Grandy recounted how during the day infants were abandoned near a hedge-row, subject to the danger of snakes.[120]

Occasionally, a small child would be given simple tasks that needed very little strength or effort. For example, when approximately six years old, James L. Smith (who was lame) was given the job of brushing flies away from his very sick master. Stearlin Arnwine was a "house boy" as a child and had to fan his master while he took a nap. All Ephriam Lawrence had to do was take coal to his master. Many slave children began their careers as water-toters for the field

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[119]Kolchin, American Slavery, 141.

[120]Bruce, New Man, 15, 17; Jacobs, Life of a Slave Girl, 87; Moses Grandy, "Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy," in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium, 17.

hands. Some also accompanied their mothers to the field to do a little work beside them. When Adrianna W. Kerns was first put in the field as a child, she had to pick up brush and stumps. She and the other children helped the adults with their rows until they were ready to "carry rows" (that is, be responsible for rows) of their own. Slave children also helped their parents with work outside the field. Ben Leitner helped his mother with the cows and calves and helped her churn butter.[121]

When slave children became old enough to perform chores, many masters rated them on a fractional basis as "quarter hands." From this rank they advanced to "half hands," "three-quarter hands," and finally "full hands." This rating system was also used for "breeding women," "sucklers," and older slaves, as well as those slaves who were partially disabled, convalescing, or diseased. Often slaves were organized into gangs in which children would be the "trash gang" or "children's squad." They would pull weeds, clean the yard, hoe, worm tobacco, or pick cotton. John Bates remembered that at cotton-picking time in autumn, adults and children alike were required to pick the cotton.

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[121]James L. Smith, Autobiography of James L. Smith (Norwich: Press of the Bulletin Company, 1881), 4; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 2, Stearlin Arnwine, 81; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 3, Ephriam Lawrence, 94; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 57; Grandy, "Narrative," 17; Olmsted, Seaboard, vol. 2, 61; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 2, vol. 9, Adrianna W. Kerns, 191; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 3, Ben Leitner, 101.

They also picked peas, gathered corn, raked up hay or fodder, and hunted for firewood. Between the ages of ten and twelve, children became fractional hands and were responsible for a regular routine of labor. By age eighteen, they became "full hands" or "prime field-hands."[122]

Children of all ages were put to a variety of uses. Thomas Jefferson included in his Farm Book the notation that "children till 10 years old to serve as nurses," "from 10 to 16, the boys make nails, the girls spin," "at 16, go into the ground or learn trades." One of Jefferson's slaves, Isaac, hauled wood for his mother, the pastry cook and washerwoman, and made the fire for her. Scott Bond's principal duty was to look after young fowls. In rainy weather, he gathered little goslings under his long shirt to protect them. A slave called Uncle Harve was given as his first task driving the cows to and from pasture. In between he worked in the field. Bert Frederick was also put to driving cows and sheep to pasture and protecting the lambs from eagles. Henry Clay Bruce's first task was feeding the livestock. He was also required to haul trees to be cut up for firewood, to work in the brick yard, and to carry things. Moses Grandy was hired out after age eight and was expected to learn how to hill corn, "keep ferry" (that is,

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[122]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 57; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 2, John Bates, 216; Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 46; Willie Lee Rose, Slavery and Freedom, ed. William W. Freehling, expanded ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 47.

work on a ferry boat), and "do other odd work."[123]

Because of his lameness, James L. Smith was exempt from field work and given chores around the plantation house. He helped knit, "card rolls" for the women who were spinning, and perform other chores for the women about the house. Both Harriet Jacobs and Martha Griffiths Browne were household slaves responsible for cleaning, helping the cook, and sewing. Elizabeth Edmonia Cooke took a little slave girl "the daughter of Harriet, to teach to knit & sew".[124]

Domestic chores could be temporary. Many owners used small children and elderly slaves as domestics, putting all available able-bodied workers in the field. Young girls from six to twelve years old were frequently used as domestic servants. They tended to the owners' children, swept, cleaned, learned how to spin, weave, cord, and sew, and waited on the table. Sometimes they slept in rooms with the whites to be on call during the night and to light the fire in the morning. Rachel Bradley was a maid and tended her owners' children. Cora Carroll Gillam was a personal servant to her mistress. She slept in the house with her

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[123]Betts, facsimile, Farm Book, 77; Isaac Jefferson, Memoirs of a Monticello Slave as Dictated to Charles Campbell in the 1840s by Isaac, One of Thomas Jefferson's Slaves (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1951), 7; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Scott Bond, 30, Uncle Harve, 115; Rawick, American Slave, ser. 1, vol. 6, Bert Frederick, 127; Bruce, New Man, 20-21; Grandy, "Narrative," 7.

[124]J. L. Smith, Autobiography, 7, 12; Cooke, "Journal," 123.

mistress, and her job was "to answer the door bell and wait on my mistress and go round with her wherever she went." According to Martha Griffiths Browne, a nine-year-old slave named Amy took care of her three younger siblings when their mother was sold.[125]

Around age ten, the tasks of slave children often became more demanding. At nine years of age, James W. C. Pennington was hired out to a stonemason, and at eleven to a blacksmith. Lunsford Lane's master set him "regularly to cutting wood, in the yard in the winter, and working in the garden in the summer." In addition to carding and knitting, James L. Smith drove the calves to the cow pen so that he and the "milk-woman" could milk the cows. He was also put in the field seven days a week to scare away crows.[126] Fanny Kemble wrote in her journal about a boy called "Jack de bird driver": "His feet, legs, and knees were all maimed and distorted, his legs were nowhere thicker than my wrist, his feet were a yard apart from each other, and his knees swollen and knocking together. What a creature to run after birds! He implored me to give him some meat, and have him sent back to Little St. Simons Island, from which he came, and where he said his poor limbs were stronger and

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[125]Kolchin, American Slavery, 110; Fox-Genovese, Plantation Household, 152; Rawick, American Slave, supp., ser. 2, vol. 1, Rachel Bradley, 51; Cora Carroll Gillam, 82; M. G. Browne, Autobiography, 58, 61-62.

[126]Pennington, "The Fugitive Blacksmith," 4; Lane, "Narrative," 6; J. L. Smith, Autobiography, 10, 21.

better."[127]

At age fifteen, Isaac Jefferson was apprenticed to a tinner for four years. Lunsford Lane was given the care of his master's pleasure horses at the same age. He also became the carriage driver and performed other jobs during the summer. Moses Grandy was sent to drive lumber in the Dismal Swamp before being sent to the field. After his stint at milking cows and carding wool, James L. Smith was made a cook on board a ship. Afterward, he was bound out to a shoemaker to learn his trade, and he remained there for four years until his master put him in his own shop. Jacob Stroyer was trained to ride his master's racing horses, but when his master died and the horses were sold, he was apprenticed to a carpenter.[128]

Slave children were not limited to working as house servants or field hands; they performed a variety of jobs. By the time he escaped at age twenty-one, William Wells Brown had been hired out twelve times and had performed ten different occupations, including house servant, field hand, waiter on board a steamboat, carriage driver, tailor's apprentice, printing office apprentice, and assistant to a slave trader.[129]

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[127]Kemble, Journal, 273.

[128]I. Jefferson, Memoirs, 31-32; Lane, "Narrative," 6; Grandy, "Narrative," 8; J. L. Smith, Autobiography, 16, 13; Stroyer, My Life in the South, 17-18, 31-33.

[129]W. W. Brown, "Narrative," 15, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31, 35, 39, 76, 85.

Many slaves were hired out, especially in the cities. Alan Bruce Bromberg studied the slaves in Virginia tobacco factories in the nineteenth century and found that a large number of boys from ten years old were employed in them. They were put to tasks requiring nimbleness and agility; both twisters and lumpmakers were chosen for their dexterity. A few young girls were employed as well. At age ten, Henry Clay Bruce was hired to work in a tobacco factory. This job was his first steady work, and he was kept busy from sunrise to sunset without being allowed to talk. Except for thirty minutes allowed for breakfast and dinner, he had to sit all day and "tie lugs."[130]

It was not unknown in the South for light-skinned females to be purchased and forced into concubinage or prostitution, sometimes at an early age. From age fourteen, Harriet Jacobs spent years fending off the advances of her elderly master. The man's wife took Jacobs into her bedroom at night to ensure that his desires were not met. While working for a slave trader, William Wells Brown saw his employer force a young girl named Cynthia to become his housekeeper and concubine. James W. C. Pennington helped raise $2,250 to save two girls, aged fourteen and sixteen, from being sold into prostitution in the deep South. Robert Newsom purchased fourteen-year-old Celia in 1850 as a cook

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[130]Alan Bruce Bromberg, "Slavery in the Virginia Tobacco Factories, 1800-1860" (Master's thesis, University of Virginia, Department of History, 1968), 14-16; Bruce, New Man, 21-22.

and a sexual substitute for his dead wife.[131]

Sometimes masters provided small rewards for their slave children who performed their work well. Martha Griffiths Browne's master gave his slave children pieces of buttered bread when they had finished their daily tasks. Isaac Jefferson stated in his memoirs that Thomas Jefferson "give them that wukked the best a suit of red or blue: encouraged them mightily." But contrary to these examples, most masters were much more willing to punish slaves for slow or poor work rather than to reward them for good work.[132]

William Wells Brown was hired to a man who kept a public house and was fond of whipping and then "smoking" errant slaves. The slaves would be tied up in a smoke-house and whipped. Then a fire of tobacco stems was made to smoke them; when this was finished, they were sent back to work.[133]

Both Henry Clay Bruce and James L. Smith were watched over by their masters, mistresses, or overseers who would whip them when they fell asleep while they were working. At age ten, Bruce was confined from sunrise to sunset under a large bench or table filled with tobacco which he had to tie, and he often fell asleep, even when he put tobacco in

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[131]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 196; Jacobs, Life of a Slave Girl, 27, 33-34; W. W. Brown, "Narrative," 47; Pennington, "The Fugitive Blacksmith," ix-x; Melton A. McLaurin, Celia, A Slave (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 18.

[132]M. G. Browne, Autobiography, 9; I. Jefferson, Memoirs, 51-52.

[133]W. W. Brown, "Narrative," 21-23.

his eyes. It took him several months to get used to his labor. Smith's mistress took her sewing and sat beside him to strike him with a whip if he fell asleep while helping the women spin. While a cook on board a ship, he was beaten every time the captain was dissatisfied with the food he had cooked. At one point, Smith became tired of this abuse and jumped overboard to drown himself, only to be pulled back on board and beaten again.[134]

Many examples exist of extreme abuse of slave children. Jacob Stroyer was beaten by a groom every time he was thrown or fell from a horse. Many times this man beat him for no reason that Stroyer could ascertain. When he could not directly oversee Stroyer's riding, he sent a slave along with orders to whip Stroyer every time he was thrown. Stroyer finally escaped this fate by throwing the groom's whip away and begging his master to apprentice him to a carpenter.[135]

Moses Grandy was beaten with a shovel for nodding off. The man who hired him was fond of gambling and kept him up many nights. Grandy was required to wait on the gambling table. When he fell asleep in the corner, his employer grabbed the shovel and beat him. In addition to breaking the shovel, the employer dislocated Grandy's shoulder and

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[134]Bruce, New Man, 21-22; J. L. Smith, Autobiography, 9-10, 17-20.

[135]Stroyer, My Life in the South, 17, 19-20, 23, 31-34.

sprained his wrist.[136]

Years before, Grandy's brother had been sent out naked on a cold day to look for a yoke of steers. Failing to find them, he returned home only to be beaten and sent back out. He failed to find them again. He piled up some leaves, lay down on them and died. Grandy also worked under an overseer who was known for severely beating slaves. This overseer beat a twelve-year-old boy to death in the fields.[137]

Many slave children complained of feeling tired and falling asleep while performing their chores. Regardless of the job that they were given to do, slave children were required to work long hours like adult slaves. Often their jobs included helping adults either in the household or in the field. Many slave children were put in charge of caring for other slaves and the animals on plantations. Whether they served as helpers or as independent workers, the jobs slave children were given to do needed to be done by someone. Often the repetition or simplicity of a task meant that it was given to a child. Henry Clay Bruce's job of tying "lugs" presents a good example of a simple job that needed to be done, even though it meant long hours of drudgery for him. Masters always had work for slaves, young and old, even in times of economic hardship.[138]

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[136]Grandy, "Narrative," 8.

[137]Grandy, "Narrative," 6, 18.

[138]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 402; Bruce, New Man, 21-22.

To put this treatment in context, the lives of slave children need to be compared with those of white children of the nonslaveholding and working classes. Many Southern defenders of slavery used the existence of what they perceived as a relatively carefree life for young slaves as an example of slavery's benevolence and paternalism. Certainly no circumstances in the southern slaveholding states could compare with Robert Owen's assertion that England's prosperity rested on the backs of thirty thousand little girls employed in industry.[139] In the northern states, industry was taking hold during the last part of the eighteenth century, and children increasingly began to supply part of the labor source. Children were valuable assets to a family in that they added their labor and income to those of their parents. However, most children, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, remained at home and worked on farms, for their parents' businesses, or around the house.[140]

From a young age, children who lived on nonslaveholding farms in the North and South had to help their parents and perform hard work at young ages. They were given specific chores to do by age six and, as they got older, they were required to take on more responsibility. They enjoyed no carefree days spent in a "nursery" or playing in the woods.

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[139]Betts, Farm Book, xviii.

[140]Bremner, Children and Youth, 145-48.

By the age of ten or twelve, white children were performing tasks similar to those of adults of the same sex. Girls helped their mothers, and boys helped their fathers. In this respect, the world of slave girls and free white girls diverged sharply. Slave children of both sexes were sent to the field, whereas white farm girls worked in the household with their mothers and other females.[141]

The work performed by white children could be difficult. Frederick Law Olmsted saw two boys not more than ten years old grinding corn in a mill in Louisiana. He commented that "the task seemed their usual one, yet very much too severe for their strength, as they were slightly built. . . . Taking hold at opposite sides of the winch, they ground away, outside the door, for more than an hour, constantly stopping to take breath, and spurred on by the voice of the papa, if the delay were long."[142]

Food for the poorer nonslaveholding southern whites was not much different from that of slaves. Pork and corn were the staples. When Olmsted stopped for accommodations at one farm in Mississippi, "a little girl, immediately, without having had any directions to do so, got a frying-pan and a chunk of bacon from the cupboard, and cutting slices from the latter, set it frying for my supper. . . . A baby lay

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[141]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 504; Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, ed., The Reader's Companion to American History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), 164.

[142]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 323.

crying on the floor. I quieted it and amused it with my watch til the little girl, having made 'coffee' and put a piece of corn-bread on the table with the bacon, took charge of it." While the family's cabin was slightly larger than the average slave cabin and contained a few more furnishings, it was still very modest.[143]

Free white children lived under modest conditions, not appreciably improved over the material circumstances of slave children. Although medical care appears to have been roughly equal, white children were less susceptible to many of the diseases that killed slave children and were more likely to survive to adulthood.[144] In many ways, the hard work white children had to perform at an early age to help their families made their lives more physically difficult. However, they were legally free and had the opportunity to grow up to be part of free society. Slave children had no such prospects. Constant work and servitude would remain with the vast majority of the slaves throughout their lives. Every window of opportunity was closed and whom they associated with and what they did was largely determined for them. For children growing up as slaves in America, this reality manifested itself at an early age, and adulthood offered little hope of changing that situation.

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[143]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 376-77, 540.

[144]Kiple and King, Black Diaspora, 72; see also above notes 37, 38, 42, 56.

CONCLUSION

The hardships endured by slaves began at birth. A slave child's life, while not always Hobbesian, was difficult. Slaves faced a bleaker prospect than their white counterparts of surviving through infancy. The rigors of the slave system directly contributed to this state of affairs. Slave mothers' poor health, combined with hard labor, severely curtailed the health of their babies. Child care was rudimentary at best; infants were left in the care of other slave children who were often resentful of their task and typically unsophisticated in the art of child rearing. If the infants survived, the care provided during the childhood years continued to be inadequate.

Slave children were confronted at an early age with having to answer to two sets of authority figures--their parents and the whites who owned or supervised them. The power and control possessed by the whites were formidable. As they grew up, slave children began to realize that the color of their skin and condition of their birth defined who they were and limited what they could do. As slaves, they were subject to beatings, deprived of formal education, and even hired out or sold away from their families. Slave children soon realized that their status as slaves left them

vulnerable to the whims of their masters and that their parents were often powerless to help them.

Slave children were a product of their circumstances. They worked hard and formed strong attachments to family and friends. They saw free white children living nearby on small family farms, and these children had to work hard as well. Most slave children tried to make the best of their conditions. As children born into slavery, they knew nothing else. Former slave Katie Phoenix summed up slavery this way: "I knew I was unhappy, but I thought everythin' was like that. I didn't know there was happiness for nobody--me nor nobody."[145]

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[145]Mellon, Bullwhip Days, 40.

APPENDIX

SLAVE POPULATION BY AGE: 1820-1860

Date of Census	Total Population of Slaves	Slave Children under 5 Years Old	Slave Children 5-9 Years Old	Slave Children 10-14 Years Old
1820	1,538,038			668,196 (total under 14 years old)
1830	2,009,043		701,163 (total under 10 years old)	621,337 (total 10-23 years old)
1840	2,487,455		844,049 (total under 10 years old)	781,323 (total 10-23 years old
1850	3,204,313	540,494	479, 088	436,192
1860	3,953,760	653,166	575,949	541,248

Source: Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce. Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, pt. 1.

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